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## Digital Records: *Characteristics, Management, and Responsibilities*

RI Department of State | State Archives & Public  
Records Administration



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## About Us

The Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration is part of the Division of Archives, Library, and Public Information within the Office of the Secretary of State. We are responsible for the following:

- The State Archives preserves and makes available for research Rhode Island's historical public records from 1638 - present;
- The Public Records Administration provides records management assistance and storage services to state agencies; and
- We also provide advice on records management to Local Government.



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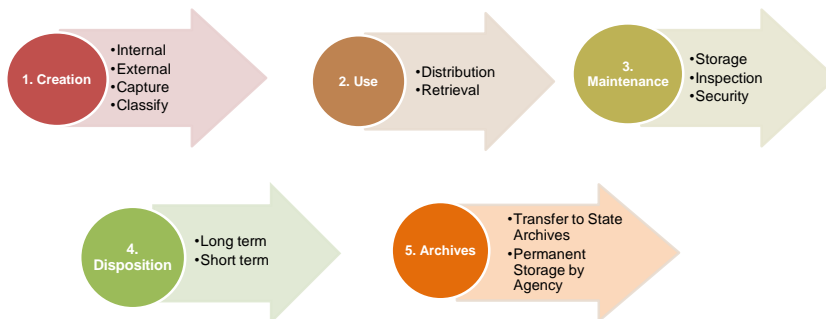
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## Life Cycle of a Record

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You are responsible to maintain records for their entire life cycle, regardless of format.



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## Creating a Record

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### Content + Structure + Context = Record

- Content is the intellectual substance of a document, including text, data, symbols, numerals, images, and sound.
- Structure is the manner in which elements are organized, interrelated, and displayed.
- Context is the organizational, functional, and operational circumstances surrounding materials' creation, receipt, storage, or use, and its relationship to other materials.



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## Managing your records

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Agencies bear responsibility for the establishment of records management programs and for the proper management of their records.

This means that as a government employee you are responsible for:

- Creating records that are complete enough to document all legally mandated activities; and
- Maintaining records of policies, decisions, and transactions.



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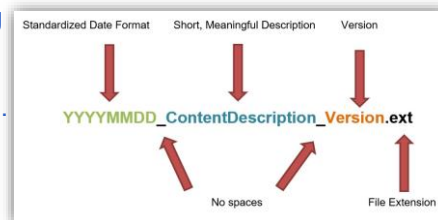
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## File Naming Guidance

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- Keep file names short, but meaningful.
- Use only alpha-numeric characters.
- Do not use spaces.
- Put the most important information first.
- Include dates and format them consistently.
- Include a version number.
- Use leading zeros when using sequential numbering.
- Don't overwrite file extensions.
- Be consistent.



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## Responsibility

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### Ensure Authenticity

- Record is demonstrably genuine, not a counterfeit, and free from tampering.

### Ensure Integrity

- Address concern about potential loss of physical or intellectual elements.
- Digital records, by themselves, lack information to remain intact, readable, and understandable over time.
- Metadata is necessary to ensure future readability and comprehension.



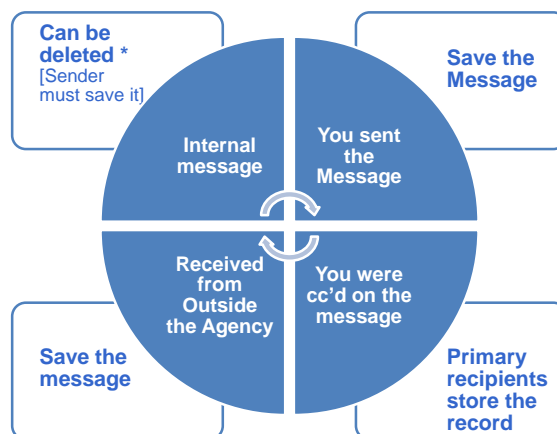
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## What do I save?

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\*unless edited or updated by you



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## Preserving Digital Records

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**Place digital records in a storage location designated by your agency for maintaining and protecting public records**

**A proper storage location for digital public records is NOT:**

- Your private storage or desktop;
- A portable disk – CD, flash drive, etc.; or
- E-mail system/servers.



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## Digitizing Paper Records

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- Notice of Intention to Digitize Form  
*Outlines plan for digitizing and steps to success*
- Digital Preservation Plan Form  
Recommended for all records  
Required for records with retention of 20+ years
- Records Management regulation

*Note: All forms and samples are available from the State Archives and on the State Archives website*



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## Preservation Challenges

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- **Technology & Knowledge**  
Frequently changing tools  
Constantly upgrading
- **Vulnerability**  
Potential for loss and destruction due to upgrades or deterioration
- **Management**  
More complex, more important, more costly
- **Time Commitment**  
Long-term planning, continuing responsibility, and continual investment



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## Obsolescence

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Acid-free paper	—————→	Hundreds of years
Acidic paper	—————→	Up to 100 years
Microfilm	—————→	500 years
Hardware and software	—————→	Variable

## Potential for loss

Data Loss = Content (language markings, visuals, color coding)

Appearance Loss = Structure (layout)

Relationships Loss = Context (relationship to other records)



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## In Review

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- **Records**  
Content, Context, Structure
- **Public Record**  
Must be maintained whether it is made or received
- **Metadata**  
Vital to understanding and preserving digital records  
Relates more than to the description of an object
- **Trustworthiness**  
Ensure the authenticity and integrity of records



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## Questions?

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### STATE ARCHIVES & PUBLIC RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

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